

# The Bismarck Tribune

## College women's basketball

Marauders feature depth, versatility **SPORTS, B5**



## 'Honor Your Hometown'

Bismarck takes part in nationwide effort

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**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2021**

bismarcktribune.com | \$2.00



JACK DURA, TRIBUNE

### TRICK OR TREAT!

Chad Orn, of Bismarck, (left) and daughters Lexis, 16, and Liberty, 11, pose for a photo Sunday with Gov. Doug Burgum during trick-or-treating at the governor's residence. Orn works for the state Department of Transportation, which had vehicles and equipment on display for trick-or-treaters.

# ND crime lab turnover is 'just not sustainable'

Lab no longer able to perform firearm, fingerprint analyses

**JACK DURA**  
Bismarck Tribune

Departures at the State Crime Lab in Bismarck have limited what evidence the lab can process for law enforcement agencies, potentially delaying cases.

Eight of 23 lab employees have left in the last two years, including five in 2021, because they've been offered far higher salaries elsewhere, according to Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem.

"The salary disparity is something that makes it much more difficult to attract and retain our forensic scientists," he told the Tribune.

One worker left for a position



**MIKE MCCLEARY, TRIBUNE**

Bismarck Police Sgt. John Brocker stands next to the department's evidence locker, with the evidence cage in the background to hold larger items.

Stenehjem said. "You have to which saw a record 32 homicides

of people from the region who are more likely to want to continue to live here, and it helps the university because this is a growing field of work," Stenehjem said.

The lab eliminated its firearms and latent fingerprint divisions due to the staffing situation. South Dakota was doing firearms analyses for the lab, but now North Dakota's neighbor is overwhelmed and unable to help anymore, Stenehjem said.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives won't take a case that isn't its own, he said. North Dakota's Crime Lab doesn't get many firearms, but it's "scrambling to find somebody" to do firearms testing, he said.

The lab needs two analysts each for fingerprint and firearms analysis: someone to do the initial work, and then a reviewer of

# Leaders launch climate summit

Nearly 200 countries gather to plan action

**FRANK JORDANS**  
**AND ELLEN KNICKMEYER**  
Associated Press

GLASGOW, Scotland — A crucial U.N. climate summit opened Sunday amid papal appeals for prayers and activists' demands for action, kicking off two weeks of intense diplomatic negotiations by almost 200 countries aimed at slowing intensifying global warming and adapting to the climate damage already underway.

As U.N. officials gaveled the climate summit to its formal opening in Glasgow, the heads of the world's leading economies at the close of their own separate talks in Italy made pledges including stopping international financing of dirty-burning coal-fired power plants by next year. But much of the agreement was vague and not the major push some had been hoping for to give momentum to the climate summit.

Government leaders face two choices in Glasgow, Patricia

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# High court to hear key case on gun permits

**JESSICA GRESKO**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is preparing to hear a gun rights case that could lead to more guns on the streets of New York and Los Angeles and threaten restrictions on guns in subways, airports, bars, churches, schools and other places where people gather.

The case the justices will hear Wednesday comes as gun violence has surged, and it could



# SD college students design meme-matching dating app

App hopes to move beyond superficial online dating trend

TANYA MANUS  
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. — What's scarier than the terrors of Halloween? For many people, it's trying to find love on a dating app.

Computer science students from South Dakota Mines have built a new dating app, Lafdr, that matches people based on their taste in memes. After testing a prototype, the app for iOS and Android launched last month.

Morgan Vagts and Debbie Liknes, who both graduated from Mines in May, channeled their frustration with existing dating apps by creating their own. Lafdr's algorithm, built by Liknes, connects like-minded users through the memes they enjoy on the app.

"Memes are a great conversation starter," Vagts said. "It keeps the conversation light and lets people be themselves. ... If you can laugh at a meme together, you know you have something in common."

Vagts said Lafdr is designed to help people find friendship or romantic connections, or users can simply browse the memes on Lafdr. Vagts and Liknes spent two years developing the app. It's geared toward college-age students but could potentially appeal to ages 18 to 35.

"We were just sitting in Debbie's living room, talking about the perils of online dating, and she joked about the idea of a meme-based app. And I thought, 'Yes. That's brilliant, let's do it,' and it evolved from there," Vagts said.

More than 90% of current college students have used a dating app, Vagts said, and there are more than one million memes shared on platforms like Instagram every day, the Rapid City Journal reported.

"There's a lot of dating apps out there. They're all the same idea of swiping on somebody's profile and they're based primarily on looks. You usually have to do an extra click (to get to their bio)," Vagts said. "It was interesting to find out we are the first people to try something really new, to take the idea of what a dating app is and put more of a spin on it."

"While you're on Lafdr, you

don't have to be thinking about all the people who didn't like you and just having dry conversations. It's a more fun and open atmosphere than most of the dating apps out there," she said.

On the first day Lafdr officially launched, Vagts said it attracted double the number of users who'd been trying the prototype. A few weeks later, the Lafdr team promoted the app via an Instagram campaign and doubled the number of users again. They're planning future campaigns to attract more users.

Liknes, who's now in Minneapolis, works on the app full-time and monitors every match the app makes.

"We like to see what it's doing. It's like a quality control measure," Vagts said. "A few weeks after we launched, we had our first relationship match. That was really exciting. ... Two days later, we had our second relationship match."

"We think there is a real market for this app," she said. "Millennials brought dating online; Gen Z has brought memes into dating."

Vagts said support Lafdr received from South Dakota Mines made the app's creation and launch possible.

"Mines helped us with building a business plan and competing in competitions and getting funding to buy an Apple computer (which was needed to build the app)," Vagts said. "The school was able to pay for a lot of things we needed for prototyping."

"Mines helped pay for a provisional patent on our technology, and they gave us prototype money to help develop our app. They also gave us the resources to do well at the Governor's Giant Vision Competition," Vagts said.

Vagts especially credits Joseph Wright, South Dakota Mines associate vice president for Economic Development, who served as the main business advisor for the Lafdr team. Vagts said she and Liknes entered the app in several competitions and lost multiple times.

"It was very discouraging. We kept going up against the best in the best competitions with life-saving biotech crazy amazing products," Vagts said. "It was discouraging to go up against people that were saving lives. Joseph's comment was 'All of these other companies are saving lives, and you guys make life worth saving.'"

Finally in April, the Lafdr team

won fourth place at the South Dakota Governor's Giant Vision student business plan competition. Vagts, Liknes, and their developers — Keegan Burnett, a 2020 Mines graduate, and Dalton Baker, who will graduate in 2022 — put in months of 12-hour days preparing Lafdr for its September launch.

Vagts now lives in Rapid City and works for B9 Creations digital manufacturing technology in addition to her role at Lafdr. She's maintained close ties with many people at South Dakota Mines who continue to offer assistance with the app.

The Lafdr team hopes to make pitches to angel investors in the next few months.

"We know that only a small percentage of venture capital investments go toward female-led businesses. We are hoping to break that trend with Lafdr," Vagts said.

"Kudos to these computer science students for using the skills they gained at Mines to build their own company. We're always proud when students use their education to change the world. This is exactly the kind of innovation and entrepreneurship we encourage at Mines," said Mines President Jim Rankin.

## Lab

From A1

labs, which Deputy Chief Jason Stugelmeyer said costs \$500 per analysis, as opposed to no cost at the state lab.

"They have not done so yet; Stugelmeyer wasn't sure how many fingerprint items Bismarck police are sitting on."

"We're still discussing who's responsible for those costs: Is it the crime lab or is it the local agency?" he said.



Stugelmeyer

Firearms examinations also would have to be contracted, he said. A further hindrance is bringing in those contracted analysts to testify at trial, "so it's now no longer anyone local here in the area, so usually the state's attorney, counties have to bear that cost to bring these experts back to testify on the case for what work they did," Stugelmeyer said.

The police also have more difficulty getting items to the lab. Stugelmeyer said the lab will accept evidence only for a half-hour duration.

"We're lucky because a lot of agencies have to mail stuff. We don't have to have that cost associated with that," he said. "We hand-deliver it, and the problem is, we'll have a bunch of evidence and then we only get a half-hour, and whatever they can't log in a half-hour we have to take back with us and try to do it a different time. It just continues to backlog everything."

The issue is minor but continues to compound "to the point where eventually when you do that for long enough, it's just going to take longer," he said.

Evidence includes sexual assault examination kits,

you have limited resources and staffing," Stugelmeyer said.

Communication both ways is key, and if police are to bear certain costs, "we don't have budgets for that," he said.

Burleigh County Sheriff Kelly Leben said "the biggest thing for us" has been a delay in processing some evidence due to the firearms and fingerprints situation.

"Fortunately, we've been able to keep working with them on certain issues, but definitely, we've seen a backlog of some of the evidence not being processed in a timely manner," Leben said.

He's emphasized communication between the lab and his office to get evidence timely analyzed. He also acknowledged the lab is addressing priority cases.

He's not aware of any specific instances of delayed prosecution, but the pace of some investigations has been slowed while investigators awaited lab results to guide their work, he said.

Firearm and fingerprint analyses are "low-frequency issues, but definitely a high priority when they do surface," the sheriff said.

Cass County Assistant State's Attorney Joshua Traiser pointed out the lab has a process for expedited testing for serious cases, such as murder or aggravated assault, and drug cases set for trial.

"My experience with the lab is that they're doing all they can to make it work, and thus far, they've done a very good job making sure we have results ready for trial when we use that process,"

## Summit

From A1

Espinosa, head of the U.N. climate office, declared at the summit's opening: They can sharply cut greenhouse gas emissions and help communities and countries survive what is becoming a hotter, harsher world, Espinosa said. "Or we accept that humanity faces a bleak future on this planet."

"It is for these reasons and more that we must make progress here in Glasgow," Espinosa said. "We must make it a success."

India Logan-Riley, an Indigenous climate activist from New Zealand, had a more blunt message for negotiators and world leaders at the summit's opening ceremony.

"Get in line, or get out of the way," Logan-Riley said.

The G-20 countries represent more than three-quarters of the world's climate-damaging emissions and G-20 host Italy and Britain, which is hosting the Glasgow conference, had looked for more ambitious targets coming out of Rome.

But major polluters including China and Russia had already made clear they had no immediate intention of following U.S. and European pledges to zero out all fossil-fuel pollution by 2050. Russia said on Sunday that it was sticking to its target of 2060.

While the opening ceremony in Glasgow formally kicked off the talks, known as COP26, the more anticipated launch comes Monday, when leaders from around the world will gather to lay out their countries' efforts to curb emissions from burning coal, gas and oil and deal with the mounting damage from climate change.

The leaders of two of the top climate-polluting nations — China and Russia — were not expected to attend the summit, though senior officials from those countries planned to participate. For U.S. President Joe Biden, whose country is the world's biggest climate polluter after China, the summit comes at a time when division within his own Democratic party is forcing him to scale back ambitious climate efforts.

At the Vatican on Sunday, Pope Francis urged the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square: "Let us pray so that the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor" are heard by summit participants.

Negotiators will push nations to ratchet up their efforts to keep global temperatures from rising by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius this century compared with pre-industrial times.

The climate summit remains "our last, best hope to keep 1.5 in reach," said Alok Sharma, the British government minister chairing climate talks.

Scientists say the chances of meeting that goal are slowly slipping away. The world has already warmed by more than 1.1C and current projections based on planned emissions cuts over the next decade are for it to hit 2.7C by the year 2100.

The amount of energy unleashed by such planetary warming would melt much of the planet's ice, raise global sea levels and greatly increase the likelihood and intensity of extreme weather, experts say. U.S. climate envoy John

Kerry warned last week of the dramatic impacts that exceeding the 2015 Paris accord's goal will have on nature and people, but expressed optimism that the world is heading in the right direction.

Sharma noted that China, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, had just raised its climate targets somewhat.

"But of course we expected more," Sharma told the BBC earlier Sunday.

India, the world's third biggest emitter, has yet to follow China, the U.S. and the European Union in setting a target for reaching 'net zero' emissions. Negotiators are hoping India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi will announce such a goal in Glasgow.

Some of the issues being discussed during the talks have been on the agenda for decades, including how rich countries can help poor nations tackle emissions and adapt to a hotter world. The slow pace of action has angered many environmental campaigners, who are expected to stage loud and creative protests during the summit.

## Guns

From A1

that the court with a 6-3 conservative majority is poised to side with them. They want the court to say the New York law is too restrictive, as are similar laws in other states. Gun control advocates acknowledge the court's composition has them concerned about the outcome.

"The stakes really could not be higher," said Jonathan Lowy, chief counsel at the gun control group Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. The court last issued ma-

turned them away. One gun case the justices did agree to hear ended anticlimactically in 2020 when the justices threw out the case.

But following the death of liberal Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg last year and her replacement by conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the court agreed to wade into the gun debate again.

Eric Tirschwell, the legal director at Everytown for Gun Safety, said there's "reason to be concerned" for groups like his that "a type of law that the court was not interested in or willing to review in the past, they

it effectively impossible for an ordinary, law-abiding citizen to obtain a license to carry a handgun for self-defense."

Lawyers for the group say the text of the Second Amendment, along with history and tradition, supports their argument that there's a right to carry a gun outside the home. The group also says that New York's law has discriminatory origins, that it was originally intended to give officials wide latitude to keep guns out of the hands of newly arrived immigrants from Europe, particularly Italians.

Both gun rights and gun control advocates say that it's unclear how broadly the court might be willing to rule and that they will be closely watching arguments for clues, particularly from the court's three newest members.

The three appointees of former President Donald Trump — Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Barrett — are conservatives but were not on the court when the justices last issued major gun rights rulings. Their actions so far have given gun rights advocates reasons to be hopeful, however.